



Big Hole Watershed Committee

Monthly Meeting Minutes

March 19, 2025 – 7:00 pm at the Divide Grange
Zoom option also provided

In Attendance

In-person: Kim Giannone, UMW/BHWC, John Reinhardt, Rancher/BHWC; Tom Bowler, Butte Resident; Betty Bowler, Butte Resident; Jim Keenan, BSB Water Utility/BHWC; Jim Hagenbarth, Rancher/BHWC; Steve Luebeck, Sportsman/BHWC; Jeff Wolk, Resident; Diane Hutton, Resident/BHWC; Dean Peterson, Rancher/BHWC; Jon Peterson, Rancher; Kaitlin Boren, DNRC; Erik Kalsta, Rancher/BHWC; Jenna Dohman, MBMG, Garrett Vasa, NRCS, Katelin Killooy, FWP; Luke Lutz, FWP; Matt Norberg, DNRC; Clayton Marxer, Madison County Weed District; Brooks Munyer, BLM, Butte FO; Amber Burch, Beaverhead County Weeds; Kevin Sheridan, BLM, Butte FO; Lindsay Babcock, BLM, Butte FO; Cole Denver, MBMG; Randy Smith, Rancher, Chris Chebul, Butte Silver Bow; Cass Kohler, TNC; Emma Fullerton, Beaverhead CD.

Zoom: Pedro Marques, BHWC

Meeting Minutes

BHWC monthly meetings are held at the Divide Grange with a virtual (Zoom) option provided thanks to Southern Montana Telephone Company, who donated the internet service. Meeting minutes and recordings are available at <https://bhwc.org/monthly-meetings/> (scroll down for meeting minutes archive). Printed copies are available during in-person meetings. Contact Tana Lynch, BHWC Associate Director, at tlynch@bhwc.org or (406) 267-3421 to suggest additions or corrections.

Reports

Streamflow and Snowpack Report – Kaitlin Boren, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation

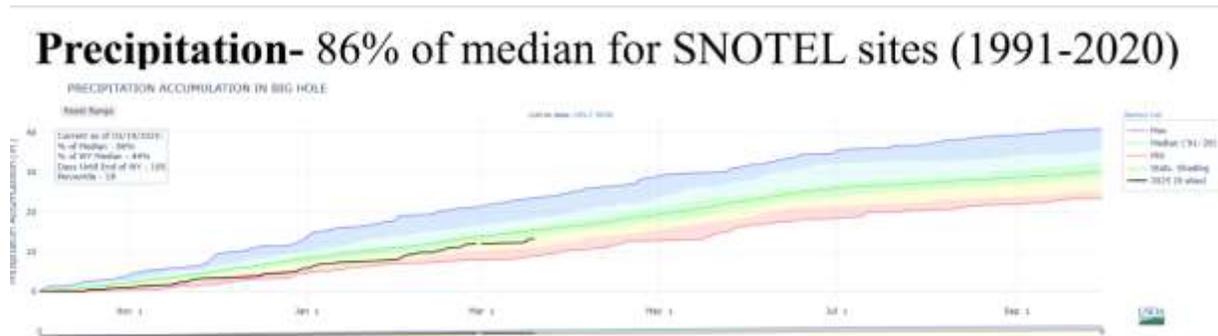
- *Streamflows: (March 19th, 2025)*
- - Wisdom (06024450): Seasonal
 - Mudd Creek (06024540): Seasonal
 - Big Hole River near Wise River (41D 08000): Seasonal
 - Maiden Rock (06025250): 306 cfs
 - Melrose (06025500): 361 cfs
 - Glen (06026210): 416 cfs
 - Stream And Gage Explorer (StAGE): <https://gis.dnrc.mt.gov/apps/stage/>

Current Streamflow

Drought Management Plan Section	Discharge (ft ³ /sec)
Section I (Saginaw Bridge on Skinner Meadows Road to North Fork Big Hole River mouth)	Ssn
Section II (North Fork Big Hole River mouth to Dickie Bridge)	Ssn
Section III (Dickie Bridge to MFWP Maiden Rock FAS)	306 cfs
Section IV (MFWP Maiden Rock FAS to Tony Schoonen FAS)	Melrose- 361cfs Glen- 416 cfs
Section V (Tony Schoonen FAS to confluence with the Jefferson River)	290 cfs

- **Precipitation: as of March 19th, 2025**

Precipitation is at 86% of median for SNOTEL sites.

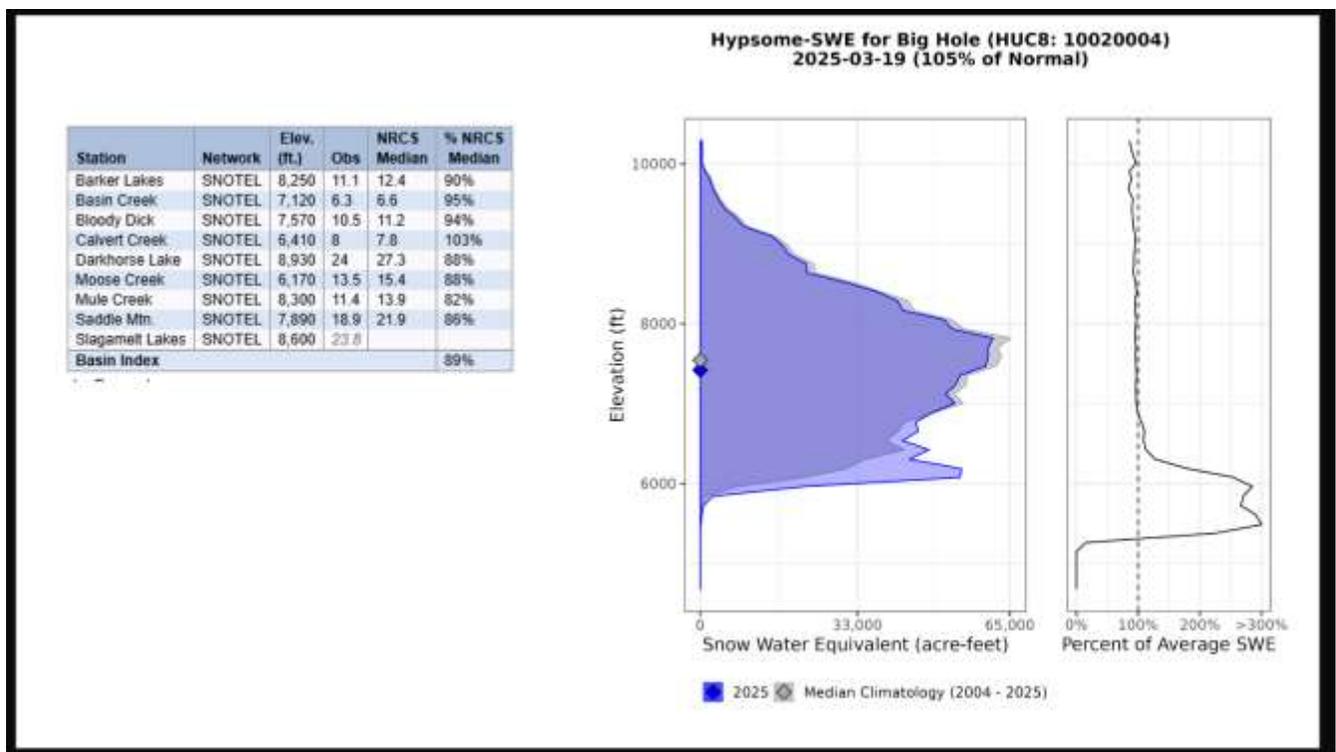
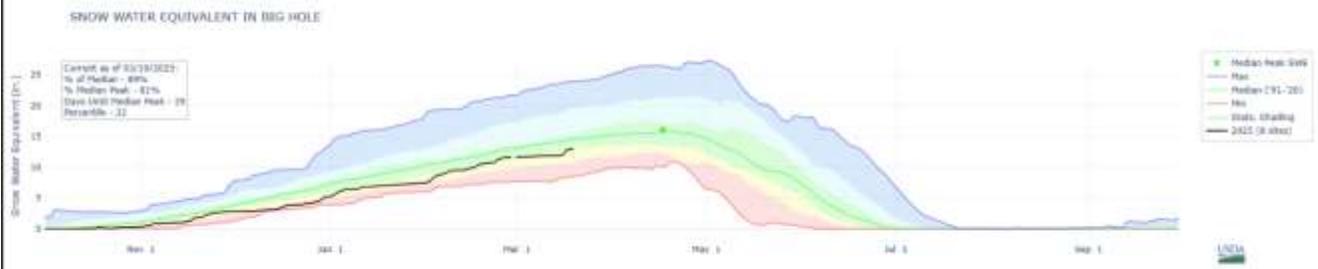


Station	Network	Elev. (ft.)	Obs	NRCS Median	% NRCS Median
Barker Lakes	SNOTEL	8,250	12.8	14.2	90%
Basin Creek	SNOTEL	7,120	6.4	7.9	81%
Bloody Dick	SNOTEL	7,570	11.1	13	85%
Calvert Creek	SNOTEL	6,410	9.9	10	99%
Darkhorse Lake	SNOTEL	8,930	23.4	25	94%
Moose Creek	SNOTEL	6,170	14.6	18.8	78%
Mule Creek	SNOTEL	8,300	11.9	14.8	80%
Saddle Mtn.	SNOTEL	7,890	16.2	20	81%
Slagameit Lakes	SNOTEL	8,600	26.7		
Basin Index					86%



Snow Water Equivalent for water year 2025 is at 89% of median and Hypsome-SWE for Big Hole is 105% of Normal

Snow Water Equivalent for WY 2025- 89% of median (1991-2020)



- **Outlook:** The 8-14 day outlook predicts slightly above normal temperatures and slightly above normal precipitation.
- **Seasonal Outlook:** The seasonal outlooks predicts slightly below normal temperatures and equal chances high or low precipitation.

- **La Niña watch:** ENSO-neutral is favored to develop in the next month and persist through the Northern Hemisphere summer (62% chance in June-August 2025).
- **U.S. Drought Monitor:** The Big Hole watershed is currently in severe drought.

Director’s Report – Pedro Marques, Executive Director

Watershed Planning and Funding Updates

- Beaver Conflict Mitigation: \$20,000 secured from America the Beautiful Wildlife Funding (3-year duration)
- High Stakes Foundation: New funding request planned for August

Project Highlights

- Forest Service Projects: E. Pioneers Conifer and Elkhorn
- BLM Project: E. Pioneers Conifer
- USFWS/TNC Collaboration: Smith Springs Design

Outreach and Advocacy

- Letters sent to:
Beaverhead County Commissioners
Elected Representatives

New Equipment

- Acquisition of Son-Tec Flowmeter

Research and Public Engagement

- Montana Public Radio: Segment on expanding tree cover and groundwater impact
- BDA Explorer: Organization now recognized on the map

Communications and Media

- SW Montana Fisheries Study: MSU student presentations on March 26

Media Coverage:

- Montana Kaimin follow-up on Grayling
- National Geographic mention of Superfund work at Mt. Haggin
- Montana Beaver Working Group: Annual meeting on April 1–2

Planning and Legislative Updates

- Stream Gage Funding: Outreach to representatives
- GWIP Kickoff: Managed Aquifer Recharge
- Legislation:
HB580: Water Rights Abandonment
HB256: Water Storage Fund
SB473: Weather Modification

Restoration Projects

DEQs 319 Program

- Already involved with two open grants
- No new proposals due to capacity limits

Montana Conservation Corps Projects

Pre-proposal submitted for natural water storage projects

Locations: Trail Creek and Selway-Saginaw

Focus:

- Meadow rewetting
- Later-season water trickle
- Hydrologic lift via reactivation of old side channels

Trail Creek specifics:

- Past work on riparian conifer encroachment
- Ben identified potential for hydrologic lift

Progress:

- Initial proposal submitted, responding to questions
- Final proposal in the works

Burma Road Sediment Project

Background:

- Road washed out during a storm
- Sediment build-up clearly visible in aerial photos

Potential:

- Strong candidate for sediment reduction under 319 program

Current status:

- Youth Employment Program exploring volunteer efforts with BLM
- Full proposal planned for next year

GIS High Meadow Storage Study

Project scope:

- GIS investigation of high meadow natural storage potential
- Cloud seeding storage site analysis

Bidding process:

- Two bids received: HDR and WGM Group
- WGM Group (Jeff Dunn) selected

Other Project Updates

California Creek Project:

- Long-term project since 2015
- Moving to final heavy-equipment stage
- Alternatives being designed (heavy vs light intervention)
- Aim to begin work in July/August

Elkhorn Mine and Mill:

- Awaiting Beaverhead Conservation District's RFP
- Watershed Committee has been leading for years
- Need to reapply officially to continue work
- Funding frozen at federal level; state grants pending

Rock Creek Fish Barrier Project:

- Ready for contracting via Future Fisheries (August target)

Conifer Thinning (Wildlife Project):

- Funding from Mule Deer and Elk Foundations
- May expand to private land if Forest Service funds don't release

Wildlife Program

Carcass Composting:

- Set to begin soon
- Contact Justin for updates (vehicle-related delays possible)

Staffing and Communications

- Tana: On maternity leave, returning next meeting
- Alia & KG: Boosting science communications, organizing internal information
- Emma: Returning for summer to support Mount Haggin restoration

New Hire:

- Hydro Technician Position: May to early September
- Trained in water measurement
- Funded by reclamation grant

Steering Committee Report – Jim Hagenbarth, Chair; Dean Peterson, Vice-Chair; Steve Luebeck, Treasurer

Jim Hagenbarth talked about Ongoing discussions with federal agencies about funding cuts and trying to maintain support for cloud seeding operations. He spoke with Tim at Beaverhead Sports about potentially getting a Polaris four-wheeler for Chet Robertson, the range riders, that can be used as a promotional opportunity, but no outcome yet. He mentioned recognition of wildlife-related funding coming from organizations like the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and Mule Deer Foundation. Some landowners are experiencing issues with elk on private (deeded) land. Jamie Burdock was invited by Jim to speak about a conflict with bighorn sheep coming off Carney Mountain and threatening her domestic sheep operation. Jamie reported

losing 60 lambs this year due to reproductive decline, with no help from FWP or the Wild Sheep Foundation. Fencing the property to prevent contact with bighorn sheep is estimated to cost \$750,000–\$1 million, which is not feasible. Current options for domestic sheep producers facing bighorn conflicts seem to be limited to selling or switching to cattle.

Jamie is seeking alternative solutions or funding to offset the significant losses.

Other Updates

Lindsay Babcock from the BLM Butte Field Office shared an update on a new forest management project covering over 10,000 acres north of Wise River (from Bear Gulch to Jerry Creek). The effort is in response to wildfire risks highlighted during the 2021 Alder Creek Fire, which nearly impacted the Big Hole River watershed and the city of Butte.

The project aims to improve forest health, remove upland conifers, and reduce hazardous fuels in a Wildland Urban Interface zone. Public scoping starts now, with a community meeting scheduled for next Wednesday in Wise River, and the comment period closes on April 1.

BLM is also testing a new “NEPA in a Week” approach to streamline environmental review, with early progress showing promise. Maps and handouts are available for further information.

Break – 10 minutes

Meeting Topic: Invasive Weeds in the Big Hole Watershed

Presented by:

Clayton Marxer – Madison County
Kevin Sheridan, Weeds Coordinator, BLM Butte Field Office.
Paul Peterson, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Chris Chebul – Butte-Silver Bow County
Amber Burch – Beaverhead County

Representatives of counties and contractors that treat invasive weeds in the Big Hole watershed will discuss recent weed control efforts, new species of concern, available cost-share programs, community spray dates, upcoming projects, and more.

Clayton Marxer- Madison County

Key Changes Being Implemented

Emphasis on Mapping

- Problem: No prior weed mapping in Madison County.
- Importance of Mapping: Understand the scope of weed issues. Measure treatment effectiveness.
- Communicate results to stakeholders (e.g., county commissioners, taxpayers).

Increased Outreach & Education

Focus Areas:

- Education, especially for underserved groups.
- Notable gap: small acreage landowners and new subdivisions.

Actions:

- Revive and expand small acreage landowner workshops.
- Partner with NRCS, conservation districts, and extension programs.

Realtor Education on Noxious Weeds

- Purpose: Address lack of awareness about legal disclosure requirements.
- Details:
 - Hosting a two-hour workshop for realtors.
 - Realtors receive continuing education credits.
 - Raise awareness of Montana weed disclosure laws during property sales.

Ongoing & Collaborative Efforts

Spray Days:

- Will continue participating in efforts like those in the Big Hole area.
- Collaboration with Amber and others doing long-term work in the region.

Funding for Weed Program

Primary Source: County taxes (mills).

- Supplemental Funding:
- Grants, especially for special project areas.
- Example: Trust Fund grants (like those used in Big Hole area).
- Learning from experienced grant writers like Amber.

Kevin Sheridan, Weeds Coordinator, BLM Butte Field Office.

Current Focus and Work

Monitoring Efforts

- Primary Focus: Monitoring weed conditions in the Big Hole, particularly Jerry Creek.
- Purpose: Assess current conditions and plan future treatments (targeting this coming summer).

Program Revamp

- Status: Rebuilding and revitalizing the BLM weeds program.
- Goal: Collect more data to evaluate treatment effectiveness and make data-driven decisions.

Upcoming Field Work

- Support: MCC (Montana Conservation Corps) crews expected for at least two weeks.
- Target Areas: Specific locations within the Big Hole watershed.

Collaboration & Community Engagement

- Local Knowledge is Key-Request to the Group: Open to tips and feedback on areas that need more attention.
- Marysville Area is a great example- there is positive landowner involvement.
- Have hosted several spray days due to community outreach.

Paul Peterson, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP)

Area of Responsibility: Fleecer Wildlife Management Area (WMA), Mount Haggin WMA, Fishing Access Sites (FAS) and State Parks in the region

Weed Spraying Programs

Fleecer WMA

- Contract: 5-year weed spraying contract; currently in year 3
- Annual Treatment: ~853 acres/year
- Cost: ~\$54,000/year
- Progress: 1,706 acres sprayed over past 2 years
- Results: Significant improvement—visible reduction in weed presence

Mount Haggin WMA

- 2023: 683.6 acres sprayed (\$44,000)
- 2024: 683.5 acres sprayed (\$43,750)
- Helicopter Spraying: 710.3 acres
- Total Over 2 Years: 2,077.48 acres treated
- All mapping data available via email request

Neutro Fixx Micronutrient Fertilizer Work

- High-end boron-based granular soil enhancer
- Purpose: Improves soil health, reestablishes native plants, suppresses invasive annuals
- Benefits: One treatment = impact of ~7 herbicide treatments, Long-lasting (up to 7 years), Environmentally beneficial vs. repeated chemical spraying

Application Sites & Progress

Fleecer WMA

- 2022: Test plots (8.88 & 11.74 acres) showed phenomenal results
- 2023: 349 acres treated
- 2024: 3 new polygons (7.37, 31.83, 64.86 acres)
- Total to Date: 473.68 acres
- Visible Change: Fleecer transformed from weed-infested to healthy native grasslands

Mount Haggin WMA:

- 2023: 19.04 acres (test plots)
- Targeting areas with poor soil (e.g., from past smelter impact)
- Application Method :Equipment: Granular spreader mounted on ATV/UTV
- Rate: ~75–80 lbs/acre (some areas up to 300 lbs)

- Cost: ~\$300/acre (product only)
- Timing: Any time of year, preferably before precipitation
- Comparison to Herbicide :Herbicide: ~\$65/acre per treatment, often repeated yearly
- Neutro Fixx: Higher upfront cost, much longer effectiveness
- Strategy: Still uses herbicide, but prefers long-term soil health solutions when possible

Fishing Access Site Weed Management

Big Hole River:

- All FAS sites sprayed in 2023 (except a few missed)
- Future Plan: Spring & fall treatments for next 5 years
- Funding: House Bill 5 passed House—hopeful for continued support

Spraying Techniques & Philosophy

- Current Contractor Approach: Broadcast spraying, not spot spraying
- Prefers late fall application—plants have gone to seed, herbicide residue sterilizes soil
- Results: Major reduction in weed density (e.g., napweed), Areas once overrun now show little or no regrowth

Community Engagement & Resources

- Open Offer: Will share shapefiles/maps on request
- Neutro Fixx Info: Has extensive data and contacts (e.g., creator Stuart Jennings in Bozeman)
- Invitation to Collaborate: Encourages interest in expanding use of Neutro Fixx, Sees potential in large-scale soil restoration using this approach

Chris Chebul, Butte/ Silverbow County

Expanding Presence in the Big Hole Watershed

- Increase involvement through organized spray days

Targeted Treatment Areas

- Duke Silver Bow Water Division Property & Rights-of-Way
- Montana Department of Transportation (MDT):
- Roadsides: Fence-to-fence weed treatments along MDT highways

Staffing & Resources

- Current Staff: 3 full-time employees
- Summer Help :Hopeful for more seasonal workers /Some may be reassigned to duties within the City of Butte

Amber Burch, Beaverhead County Weed Coordinator

Education & Awareness

Jubilee Whitetop (Hoary Alyssum):

- Highly toxic to livestock
- Promoted awareness with handouts and discussion

Car Wash Discount Program:

- \$2 discount at Mini Car Wash for vehicles with conservation licenses
- Partnership between BLM and Beaverhead County to prevent weed spread

2024 Program Overview

Noxious Weed Trust Fund Grant:

- \$25,000 for commercial applicator services
- Focused on 100-ft river corridor and Wise River

Spray Days:

- 12 spray days held
- Treated approx. 530 wetted acres (more in total area)

Forest Service Projects:

- Trail Creek, Alder Creek, Timber Ridge burn areas

Monitoring:

- Yellow Toadflax (2019, 2021)
- Biocontrol bugs (*Mecinus janthiniformis*) found and working

Biocontrol Development

- *Mogulones crucifer* (for houndstongue): Promising unofficial biocontrol from Canada, Currently illegal to move in Montana (agricultural pest designation), Efforts underway to change its legal status

New & Emerging Threats (New Invaders)

- Rush Skeletonweed: Highly invasive; spreads by air and roots, Found at Mystic Lake Trailhead (2016), Currently under close monitoring
- Leafy Spurge: Extremely persistent and aggressive, Found in Twin Bridges and upper Big Hole areas
- Dalmatian Toadflax: New to the Big Hole (found along scenic byway)
- *Ventennata*: Worse than cheatgrass; not grazed by livestock, Found near scenic byway
- St. John's Wort: Found in low numbers near Hwy 43 bridge
- Blueweed: Near border at Chief Joseph Pass, Spread via sand used on roads in winter
- Yellow Star Thistle: From WA/ID; causes "chewing disease" in horses
- Medusahead Grass: Similar to native bottlebrush but much more harmful

Mapping & Monitoring Tools

EDDMAPS Pro App:

Public can report sightings via mobile app, County receives updates and confirms ID, Helpful for tracking infestations in real-time

2025 Project Planning

Upcoming Grant Funding:

- New funding for Big Hole and Wise River
- Only local project to receive full funding (no reductions)

Collaborative Partners:

- MDT, County Roads, FAS, BLM (pending new agreement), Forest Service
- Existing project support from RMEF, MDF, RAC (pending council appointment)

Education Plans:

Fall workshop on new invasive species (e.g., feral hogs)

Cost Share & Community Support

Weed Whacker Ball Funds:

- Raised \$19,000 in 2024 (after expenses)
- Supported: Additional \$10k for applicators, \$1,800 for landowners (herbicide/application), \$3,000 for Wise River herbicide

Education programs

2025 Ball Date: September 13, 2025

Best Practices & Chemical Advice

- Toadflax Control: Best chemical: Telar, Needs strong surfactant due to waxy cuticle
- Rush Skeletonweed: Do not pull — can trigger aggressive regrowth, Clip & spray; don't transport in trucks

Partner & Community Updates

Milkweed Discussion:

- Formerly listed, now native — not legally treatable
- Concerns over uncontrolled spread vs. value to monarchs
- Polarizing topic in weed management

Railroad Corridors:

- Ongoing challenge; key vector for re-infestation
- Compliance improves with consistent contact

Forest Service Status:

- Dire staffing cuts—no weed crews, wildlife techs, or trail crews
- Collaboration with nonprofits (e.g., Centennial Valley Assoc.) proving vital

Community Action:

- Local ranchers and landowners taking initiative with spray days
- Chemical donations supporting volunteer efforts

Upcoming Meetings

- Wednesday, April 16, 2025:
 - 7:00 PM at the Divide Grange Hall- Topic: Upper Big Hole Arctic Grayling CCAA Update

Adjourn